

MEETING OF THE HOUSTON/GALVESTON NAVIGATION
SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
January 28, 2000

On the call of its sponsor, Rear Admiral Paul J. Pluta, USCG, Commander, Eighth Coast Guard District, and after public notice in the Federal Register (Meeting Notice, 64 Fed. Reg. 71843, Dec. 22, 1999), the fifty-sixth meeting of the Houston/Galveston Navigation Safety Advisory Committee was held on Friday, January 28, 2000. The meeting was held in the Conference Room at the Houston Pilots' Office, Houston, Texas. The published agenda for the meeting is included as enclosure (1). A list of attendees is attached as enclosure (2). The documents which were made available to and/or prepared by the Committee are available for public inspection and copying at the office of the Committee's Executive Secretary, CDR Peter S. Simons, USCG, at U.S. Coast Guard Vessel Traffic Service Houston/Galveston, 9640 Clinton Drive, Houston, TX 77029. A verbatim recording of the meeting is available upon request. Requests for copies of the verbatim recording must be received by January 27, 2002.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Tim Leitzell at 9:04 AM.

OPENING REMARKS BY COMMITTEE SPONSOR

Rear Admiral Pluta welcomed members and guests.

OPENING REMARKS BY COMMITTEE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Captain Gusman welcomed members and guests. He noted that Rear Admiral Pluta had made a particular effort to attend the meeting and that the Admiral's trip to Houston had also included an orientation shipride along the HSC.

OPENING REMARKS BY COMMITTEE CHAIR

Chairman Leitzell greeted Committee members and attendees. Self-introductions of the Committee members and attendees followed.

APPROVAL OF NOVEMBER 23, 1999 MINUTES

A motion was made and seconded to approve the previous meeting's minutes, as amended. (The amendment consisted of a change to the list of Committee members present at the November meeting. The approved minutes are included as enclosure (3)). The motion carried.

STATE OF THE WATERWAY ADDRESS

Commander Peter Simons, Commanding Officer, and Mr. Tim Hicks, Operations Manager, VTS Houston/Galveston, presented the State of the Waterway address. The address was broken down into five general areas: transit summary, detailed statistics on channel incidents, review of major ship channel events, discussion on waterway hazards and waterway restrictions (including the problem of continuing damage to aids to navigation along the HSC) and a preview of ship channel projects and

VTS goals for the coming year. A copy of the slides presented as part of this presentation is included in enclosure (4).

During the course of the presentation Rear Admiral Pluta made several comments regarding the tremendous cost to the Federal Government of replacing damaged aids to navigation along the HSC. Admiral Pluta noted that he believes strongly in the principal of prevention through people and that his comments focused not on assessing blame for aids to navigation damage but on highlighting the cost associated with the damage. Rear Admiral Pluta noted the following expenditures for maintenance of aids to navigation in the Houston/Galveston area.

	<u>Calendar Year 1998</u>	<u>Calendar Year 1999</u>
Discrepancy response cost	\$ 1,280,000	\$ 1,160,000
Cost of tender service time	\$ 679,000	\$ 616,000
Total recoveries	\$ 41,000	\$ 143,000

(The "total recoveries" entry reflects funds recovered by the Coast Guard from entities responsible for damaging or destroying an aid to navigation.) Rear Admiral Pluta challenged the Committee to look at the underlying causes of the aids to navigation discrepancies: what types of vessels are involved; whether on-scene conditions, including weather and time of day, play a factor in the incidence of aid knockdown. He also asked that the Committee look at means by which discrepancies could be reduced, such as by traffic controls, limiting meeting situations, etc. Rear Admiral Pluta concluded his comments by noting that he would prefer to focus on reducing the incidence of aid knockdown.

At the conclusion of the address, Rear Admiral Pluta asked the Committee and the audience for feedback on the presentation. Specifically, he wanted to know what areas of emphasis the Committee would like the VTS to focus on in future data collection and analysis efforts. Ms. Clark noted her company's concern with the frequency of incidents occurring just after vessels reported underway. Ms. Roof added that she would like to see the data reflect more accurately the location of the casualty. Captain Morris expressed concern about the aid knockdown rate, noting that area safety initiatives, such as simulator training, should be an effective way of examining the problem and perhaps reducing the incidence of AtoN knockdowns. The Committee expressed a general desire to acquire further details about the circumstances surrounding aid knockdowns. Captain Cusson (Chief, Aids to Navigation Branch, Eighth Coast Guard District) noted that this may be a difficult goal to achieve, given the lack of current information as to when aids are knocked down. The location of aids to navigation was also discussed as a possible factor contributing to the AtoN knockdown rate. Chairman Leitzell suggested that the Committee disseminate information on the impact of the AtoN knockdown problem to the Houston area maritime community, noting that HOGANSAC would be the ideal vehicle for publicizing the area-wide problem associated with the aids to navigation discrepancy rate along the ship channel. There was some discussion regarding the interaction between commercial fishing vessels and vessels constrained to the HSC.

OLD BUSINESS

PORTS

Ms. Clark reported on the funding problems associated with PORTS. In essence, the Fiscal Year 2000 budget for NOAA did not include any resources to expand the PORTS system. All PORTS projects are on hold. Although Congress may authorize additional funds for PORTS, Ms. Clark suggested that HOGANSAC send a letter to the Coast Guard emphasizing the importance of PORTS to the Houston/Galveston maritime community. Ms. Clark noted that she, and representatives from the Houston Pilots and VTS, was scheduled to meet with Jim Dickson from NOAA on January 28th to discuss PORTS. The objective of the meeting was to receive a briefing on PORTS and discuss the issue of changes to the reference datum NOAA uses for the system. Rear Admiral Pluta asked whether there was sufficient funding for operations and maintenance of the existing system. Ms. Clark noted that the current budget included money for O & M, but that future expansion (such as a meter in the vicinity of Exxon Baytown) would have to be funded privately.

Mr. Miller asked if there was the potential for a Federal-state partnership in support of PORTS. He noted that the Houston-Galveston Area Committee funded local safety and environmental initiatives and suggested that local PORTS meters might be supported through a similar mechanism. Ms. Clark noted that in other regions of the country PORTS systems are funded locally, citing Tampa as an example. Ms. Clark noted that the local port share was \$8,000 to \$15,000 for operations and maintenance of each PORTS buoy and \$30,000 to \$40,000 to establish a new PORTS site. She noted that the PORTS system in San Francisco Bay is funded through state monies. Finally, Ms Clark indicated that NOAA will continue to perform the data verification and analysis functions for the PORTS network and that NOAA would continue to assume responsibility for disseminating information to the public .

Ms. Roof suggested that the work group assigned to this issue should prepare a letter to the Commandant of the Coast Guard and to Congress in support of PORTS. The letter should address the importance of PORTS to safe and efficient navigation along the ship channel. The letter should tie PORTS to the national MTS initiative, noting that it is an inexpensive solution for preventing allisions and collisions.

ACOE Dredging Projects

Mr. Miller presented an update on the status of specific portions of the ship channel dredging deepening and widening project. The ENTRANCE CHANNEL EXTENSION is complete. The hopper dredges EAGLE I and B.E. LINHOLM are working in the Galveston Bay ENTRANCE CHANNEL. Approximately one-half of the project is complete with completion estimated for April 2000. The CALIFORNIA is about halfway through the LOWER BAY dredging project. Completion is forecast for late calendar year 2000. The UPPER BAYOU project is approximately four months behind schedule. The MILLENIUM is working in the vicinity of the Battleship TEXAS with submerged pipelines across the HSC and Old River. The UPPER BAY project, a two-year contract, has been awarded to Weeks Marine. Completion is scheduled for December 2001. A contract for dredging in the LOWER BAYOU is to be awarded this year. Despite sporadic delays, completion of the entire project is projected for the end of calendar 2003.

Captain Morris asked about the relocation of aids to navigation in the lower bay once dredging was completed. Aids will be relocated on a range-by-range basis once dredging operations are complete and the new range lights (marking the centerline of the channel) have been constructed.

Captain Gusman wanted to ensure that there was coordination between the Army Corps of Engineers and Coast Guard aids to navigation staff. Representatives from the Corps, the Eighth Coast Guard District (Office of Aids to Navigation) and Group Galveston (Aids to Navigation office) will meet to discuss the details of the dredging projects and the AtoN changes necessitated by the deepening and widening project, including a timeline for making the necessary changes to the AtoN system. Captain Cusson discussed some of the issues leading to delays in construction of range lights in the lower portion of Galveston Bay.

The issue of barge lanes was discussed in some detail. The Corps representative noted that language authorizing construction of the barge lanes was included in the House Authorization Bill. Below Red Fish, barge lanes are in the process of being constructed.

Mr. Miller suggested that there needed to be a group to meet, perhaps monthly, to coordinate area-wide dredging operations (not just dredging sponsored by the Corps of Engineers). He noted that there are facility dredging issues which also require coordination.

Chairman Leitzell asked the two Port of Houston Authority representatives to initiate a document that would identify the current status of the barge lanes project. Mr. Jackson noted that Tom Kornegay supported the barge lanes and had traveled to Washington to express his support for funding of the lanes. Chairman Leitzell noted that the barge lanes are of critical importance to the local maritime community.

Mr. Miller distributed copies of the Port of Houston Authority pamphlet entitled "Implementation of the Beneficial Use Plan Houston-Galveston Navigation Channels, Texas Project." (Enclosure (4).) The pamphlet identifies dredging areas and environmental beneficial use sites being constructed in conjunction with the navigation improvements to the HSC.

Pipeline Safety

Ms. Clark briefed the Committee on efforts to locate and chart pipelines impacting safe vessel navigation. She noted that in the offshore environment we now have a finished product. She showed some mylar overlays prepared for area (offshore) navigation charts by the Minerals and Management Service. She noted that it would be difficult to print MMS data on existing NOAA charts. This is because MMS uses NAD 79 as the reference datum while NOAA has converted all navigation charts to NAD 83. Thus, it's difficult for NOAA to import the information into its nautical chart database. NOAA is looking to hire a private printer to print its charts, with printing to be completed on demand rather than in discrete runs as before. With respect to charting pipelines in the inland section of the Houston/Galveston area, NOAA is looking to work with the state entities to identify locations but is concerned about the reliability of data provided by state entities since NOAA has no control over the data provided by local entities, such as the Texas Office of Pipeline Safety.

Mr. Miller noted that the Port of Houston Authority had hired a private contractor to survey certain sections of Galveston Bay and produce a pipeline map of the HSC. An assessment meeting for the contract is scheduled for February 8. Mr. Miller noted that pipeline removal and installation operations in the vicinity of the HSC were ongoing. The PHA effort includes a requirement that contractors laying, or removing, pipelines provide "as-built" drawings to PHA so that an accurate database can be developed.

Facility Mooring Depths

Captain Morris and Commander Simons reported on the status of Committee efforts to compile information on mooring depths at channel-side facilities. A draft cover letter, for signature by the Committee Chairman, and enclosure (consisting of a survey to be completed by terminal owners and operators) was circulated for comment. (Enclosure (5).) The package to be mailed to all terminal owners and operators includes a letter from the Captain of the Port documenting his concern for the accuracy of information on mooring depths at channel-side facilities. (Enclosure (6).)

Some discussion ensued as to how frequently the information requested should be updated, with comments made that some areas would require more frequent updating than others. It was suggested that responsibility for accuracy of the data really rests with the terminal owners and operators. (Ms. Roof suggested that published data reflect the date of the survey so that those accessing the information will have a way of gauging the currency of the information.) There were also questions as to who would maintain, and update, the data. Captain Morris speculated that the data could be maintained by the pilots, Marine Exchange or perhaps on a HOGANSAC website.

Committee Outreach Initiative

Chairman Leitzell asked that Committee members involved with other groups (ITOL was specifically mentioned) with an interest in navigation safety provide him with the names of those groups. He will then approach the organizations with an offer to provide a brief presentation on HOGANSAC.

NEW BUSINESS

Committee Organizational Issues

Chairman Leitzell reported briefly on the substance of the Subcommittee meetings held on Thursday, January 13th. The Committee decided to discontinue its subcommittee structure and rely instead on ad hoc working groups to identify and pursue resolution of issues as directed by the Committee. Mr. Miller distributed a summary of the January 13th meeting that identifies the areas of emphasis discussed and the Committee members responsible for monitoring the issue on behalf of the Committee. (Enclosure (7).)

Pollution Issue

Captain Gusman raised concern over recent discussions about environmental pollution in the Houston area and the potential for pollution reduction measures (such as restrictions on exhaust from

internal combustion engines) to impact commerce along the HSC. Mr. Miller noted that the PHA Environmental Affairs Manager is very closely following the issue. Captain Gusman suggested that the PHA Environmental Affairs Manager be invited to address the Group at its next meeting and that a representative from the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission be invited as well.

Bridge between Bolivar and Galveston

Mr. Jackson noted that there continues to be discussion about constructing a bridge between Bolivar and Galveston. Mr. Jackson noted that PHA is opposed to construction of the bridge because of the potential air draft limitations it would impose. Ms. Roof noted that the Port of Galveston was also opposed to the bridge because it limited their port development options. There was some discussion about the particulars of the proposed design (span, air draft, location). Mr. Jackson promised to continue to track the issue for the Committee. He indicated that he would contact the Texas Department of Transportation, Houston Office to find out when public meetings would be held (if at all) so that the Committee's views would be represented.

Captain Cusson noted that the bridge permitting project, a precursor to any planning and construction efforts, is a particularly complicated one. The Coast Guard had not received any inquiry from the State of Texas regarding a proposed bridge between Galveston and Bolivar. Captain Cusson suggested that the Committee invite a representative from the Bridge Branch, Office of Aids to Navigation, Eighth Coast Guard District to make a presentation at a future meeting on the mechanics of the bridge permitting process.

Houston Electronic Navigation Committee

Captain Morris noted that the committee would meet at 2:00 pm on January 28 at the Houston Pilots Office.

National Weather Service Customer Meeting

Captain Morris announced that the National Weather Service would be hosting a meeting at its Dickinson offices. The meeting will focus on ways the Weather Service can better serve the maritime community.

NAVSAC Meeting

It was noted that the Navigation Safety Advisory Committee would be holding its spring meeting in New Orleans in conjunction with a meeting of the Lower Mississippi River Waterways Safety Advisory Committee. Rear Admiral Pluta invited members of the Committee to attend one or both of the meetings and take advantage of the trip to New Orleans to visit the new Vessel Traffic Center being developed by Lockheed-Martin as part of the Port and Waterways Safety System project.

NOAA Representative at Next Meeting

It was suggested that the Committee invite a representative from NOAA to be present at the next regularly scheduled meeting. Ms. Clark volunteered to keep NOAA informed of the date and time for the next meeting.

Coast Guard's Y2K Posture for 2/29/00

The Coast Guard was asked whether its posture for the 2/29/00 Y2K rollover event would be any different than the policy adopted for the January 1st event. Admiral Pluta indicated that he had not received any different direction from Washington. He did note that the 2/29 date had presented a problem when DOD facilities, equipment and software were tested as part of the Y2K preparations. As soon as guidance is provided from Coast Guard Headquarters it will be disseminated to the local Captains of the Port and maritime community. No one in attendance at the meeting could identify any marine-related failures attributable to the Y2K software programming issue.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the full Committee will be held at the Corps of Engineers facility in Galveston at 10:00 AM on May 24, 2000. [Executive Secretary's note: due to a conflict the meeting will be held instead on **Wednesday, May 24 at 8:30 AM** in the **offices of the Houston Pilots**, 8150 South Loop East, Houston, Texas.]

The Committee's working groups will meet Thursday, May 4, 2000 at the Houston Yacht Club, 3620 Miramar, Seabrook, Texas, beginning at 10:00 AM.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:36 PM.

WAYNE D. GUSMAN
Executive Director

Certified: TIMOTHY R. LEITZELL
Committee Chair

Encl: (1) Published Agenda
(2) List of Members and Guests in Attendance
(3) Minutes, as amended, for the HOGANSAC meeting of November 23, 1999
(4) Slides from State of the Waterway Address
(5) Draft Terminal Questionnaire and Cover Letter
(6) Captain of the Port Houston/Galveston Letter dated October 18, 1999
(7) Report of the HOGANSAC Subcommittee Meeting of January 13, 2000